



STATE OF IOWA

TERRY E. BRANSTAD, GOVERNOR
KIM REYNOLDS, LT. GOVERNOR

STEM ADVISORY COUNCIL BROADBAND COMMITTEE

Co-Chair John Carver, Superintendent, Howard-Winneshiek Community School District
Co-Chair Robert von Wolfradt, Chief Information Officer, State of Iowa
Amy Kuhlert, Program Manager, Connect Iowa
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Karl Hehr, Director of Technology Services, Ames Community Schools District
Galen Howsare, Chief Financial Officer, Iowa Association of School Boards
Karen Randall, Keystone Area Education Association
Michael Sadler, Assistant VP for Public Policy
Larry Siegel, Iowa School Finance and Information System Services
Jeff Weld, Executive Director, Governor's STEM Advisory Council
Josh Byrnes, State Representative, District 14
Steven Soddors, State Senator, District 36

September 19, 2013

The STEM Advisory Council Broadband Committee is soliciting input from stakeholders all across Iowa who can offer insights into the unique broadband challenges facing the state, as well as provide thoughts on possible solutions. This input will help enhance efforts in developing effective policy recommendations to expand broadband access, adoption and use for all Iowans.

To offer comments, please address the questions below. All responses are considered public information, so please do not include confidential information in your response.

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- I. What barriers or other issues can you identify that may impede the increase of broadband access, adoption and use across the state?

The increase of broadband access, adoption and use is impeded by the cost to Iowa's public libraries of robust, high speed internet access. Iowa has 544 public libraries, with 75% of them located in small Iowa communities (population under 2500). Two-thirds of all Iowans have an active public library card, and more than 53,000 Iowans visit public libraries every day. Almost all Iowa libraries provide free internet computers, free wireless access, and formal or informal digital literacy instruction. Public libraries are the primary location of no-charge digital literacy instruction statewide.

Many Iowa public libraries have a strong need to increase the size of their internet bandwidth, but are unable to afford to do so. One particular challenge is that many internet providers have graciously provided household strength internet access to public libraries at no charge – but most libraries now need to upgrade that access to a business-grade connection and do not have the funding to do so. The average total library income in the 412 Iowa public libraries in towns under 2500 population is less than \$85,000 per year. This funding must be used for staffing and library materials as well as on internet access and other infrastructure needs.



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Having very slow internet speed after school, when many students come to the public library, is a very common problem in libraries across the state. Again, these libraries have the need but not the funding to increase their bandwidth.

- II. If you had to choose one *primary* barrier, what would that be?
Cost
- III. What recommendations do you have to overcome these barriers?
 - a. Develop state grants to assist public libraries in purchasing more internet bandwidth.
 - b. Recognize and express appreciation to internet service providers who already provide free or low-cost internet service to libraries, and encourage other providers to do the same.
- IV. What are your expectations for future access needs?
It is very clear that bandwidth needs of public libraries will dramatically increase. Three trends that speak to the future need are:
 - a. More and more schools are providing a computer to every student. The students bring their devices to the public library after school and expect high-speed wireless broadband access.
 - b. Use of e-books is rapidly increasing.
 - c. Videos are increasingly used in continuing education and employee education. When Iowans use public libraries to take a course, videos are often part or all of the course and high-speed internet is necessary to view the video without interruption.

- V. Other comments?
Thank you for the opportunity to present information about the important role of Iowa's public libraries in increasing broadband access, adoption and use across the state. Iowa's libraries provide a critical link to the digital world. Libraries impact workforce development by providing online access to employment information and skills development. Libraries are a big part of education in our state in that many students from k-12 through college use computer access in libraries to do homework and locate information. Libraries affect healthcare by providing information about wellness, diseases, and insurance. Iowa's quality of life is enhanced by the high quality services provided by our libraries. Libraries need greater broadband access in order to better provide these important and heavily used services.



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